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ABSTRACT

Oral language development in early childhood education is concerned with conceptual development as well as with skill formation. There seems to be an order in which most children learn to verbalize basic concepts. This guide lists classroom activities that may be used to facilitate and enhance the conceptual development of kindergarten children in heterogeneous groups which include children who are just learning English. The activities are grouped in the following main categories: (1) naming people and objects; (2) following directions; (3) describing actions in progress; (4) describing positional relationships; (5) describing objects; size, color, shape and texture; (6) making comparisons; (7) identifying groups; (8) giving bases for grouping; and (9) telling stories. (Author/TL)

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PRESCHOOL EDUCATION SERIES: English as a Second Language in Kindergarten -- Language and Concept Development

Oral language development in early childhood education is concerned with conceptual development as well as with basic skill formation. Children who come to school more fluent in Vietnamese will be able to progress more rapidly in this conceptual development if Vietnamese is used for instruction, at least until English has been learned as a second language. Children who come to school speaking a nonstandard dialect of English are naturally quite capable of continuing their conceptual development in this language. The primary danger for both groups of children is that the teacher may not understand their linguistic system, and may not permit them to build upon what they have already learned.

From a linguistic standpoint, there seems to be an order in which most children learn to verbalize these concepts. The following types of activities may be used with heterogenous groups which include children who are just learning English.

1. Naming People and Objects
   a. Put ten strips of masking tape on the floor to represent rungs on a ladder. Place an object on each of the rungs. Have the children take turns picking up an object on each rung and saying:
      This is a (ball)
   b. Display several objects on a table. Ask the children to look at the objects and try to remember where they are. Then have the children close their eyes and remove one object. Ask the children which object is missing. At another time, have the children close their eyes and rearrange the order of the objects. Have the children guess which objects are out of order. Then add an object while their eyes are closed, and ask which object has been added.
   c. Ask the children to remember one object or person they saw before school started that day. Have the children illustrate what they saw and display the illustrations, with appropriate labels if desired.

2. Following Directions
   a. Have the children sit in a circle on chairs. Talk about right and left. Play a game where the children either move to the chair on their left or right depending on the direction given by the teacher. Let individual children pretend to be the teacher and give directions to the others.
   b. Have the children stand with their feet apart and jump up, turning either right or left according to your direction.

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c. Give each child three pipe cleaners to make a man. Show the children how to make their man by taking one pipe cleaner, shaping a circle at one end to serve as the head, and leaving the other end straight to serve as the body. Take a second pipe cleaner, twist it around the first pipe cleaner just below the head to make the arms. Shape the third pipe cleaner into a "V" shape. Pieces of crepe paper may be used for later activities.

3. Describing Actions in Progress

a. Use the pipe cleaner figures made in activity 2c to talk about different ways to move. Talk about the position of the legs and arms as you talk about each movement. Words to know or learn: run, jump, hop, sit, stand, skip, walk, crawl, somersault, tip toe.

After the children have become acquainted with the words, have them shape their pipe cleaner figure to represent different movements. Make a bulletin board display with the pipe cleaners, and label each with the appropriate word for the action. The children should be able to describe what each is doing.

b. Choose one child to be "it". Have the rest of the children close their eyes while "it" walks, runs, jumps, or skips. Ask the children to guess what "it" does. The child who guesses correctly may be "it".

c. Take pictures of the children in different actions, such as a child painting, a child sitting, a child playing, a child washing his hands, a child eating, a child sleeping, etc. Talk about each picture, and ask the children to describe each action. Display them around the room.

d. Have the children stand in a circle and use a large ball. Give the ball to one child and have him either roll or bounce the ball to another. As he does, have him name the child and describe the action. For example:

I am rolling the ball to Harry.
I am bouncing the ball to Jane.

4. Describing Positional Relationships

a. Have each child take off a shoe. As you give directions, have the children put their shoe in appropriate places. For instance, have the children place their shoe beside, under, behind, on top of, or in front of their chair or table.

b. Bring a cardboard box and some real objects to class. Demonstrate the meaning of inside and outside.

The ball is in the box.
The ball is outside of the box.

Have the children repeat sentences with you as you put various objects in or outside of the box. Next have small groups say where you put objects. Then have individual children respond.

c. Bring several spools of thread in different colors to class. Have one child at a time come up and have this child choose one spool of thread. Tell the child where to put the spool, and have him respond. For example:

I put the spool of red thread under the table.

d. With the spools of thread, have the children take turns putting one spool of thread between other spools of thread. Describe the action, and then have the children describe the position of the spools. A child might say:

Mary put the spool of yellow thread between the red and black spools of thread.

e. Use the pipe cleaner figures made in activity 2c to demonstrate the following positional words: right hand side, left hand side, on top of, under, beside, behind, in front of, in the ____, and outside the ____. Have the children put their pipe cleaner figures in the appropriate place as you give directions. For example:

Put your boy under the table.

f. As the children are lining up to go to lunch, recess, etc., take the opportunity to use words like in front of, behind, between, first, and last. As the children are coming over for a story or for music, use words like beside, on the left, on the right, etc.

5. Describing Objects: Size, Color, Shape and Texture

a. Have the children stand in a circle without holding hands. Choose one child to be "it". Have "it" walk around the circle while he says,

Have you seen my friend?

He then starts to describe one of the children in the circle.

He has a red shirt, brown pants, and black shoes.

As soon as the child who is in the circle with this description notices he is being talked about, he starts running away from "it". If "it" catches the child before he returns to his place, he is "it" next and describes another child. Otherwise, the first child is still "it".

b. Bring several objects to school which are different sizes and shapes. Ask three children to come to the front of the room and blindfold them. Give the child on the right an object and ask him to describe how it feels. Pass the object to the child in the middle and have him describe the size. Pass the object to the last child and have him describe its shape. Then ask the blindfolded children to guess what the object is.

c. Let the children feel and look at many objects with different textures, shapes and sizes. Help the children describe how each object feels. Later place the same objects in a bag. Have one child at a time put his hand in the bag and describe one object. The child might say,

It is round, small, and smooth.

Then he can try to guess what the object is.

d. Have several objects on the table of various colors, shapes and sizes. Call on one child at a time to choose an object and tell as many things as he can about it to the rest of the class.
e. Bring some objects with unusual shapes to the classroom, such as a Pepsi bottle, empty soap container, etc. Show one object at a time to the children and ask them to describe its shape.

6. Making Comparisons
a. Show the children a piece of chalk which has been used and another piece which has not been used yet. Ask the children to compare the two pieces. See if they can tell how they are different. Ask why one is shorter. They can also compare a sharpened pencil with an unsharpened one, and a used crayon with an unused one.
b. Collect and bring to school groups of objects which are the same in terms of a general characteristic (such as all round), but different in specific characteristics. These groups might include a ball, an orange, and a round baby's rattle; a ping pong ball, a golf ball, and a boiled egg; a rope, a string, and a rubber band; a ball of cotton and a furry animal. Invent riddles for each group of objects to help the children guess what you have brought. Give more clues to help the children guess what specific item within a group you are thinking about. For instance, give the following clues for the group with the rope, string, and rubber band to help the children guess you are thinking specifically of the rubber band.

I can tie something with it.
It comes in different colors.
It can stretch.

After the children have solved the riddle, discuss why it couldn't have been something else within the group, and why it couldn't have been another group.

c. Collect bottle caps and bring them to school. Have the children count the caps daily. Compare the caps each day: we have more Pepsi caps; we have fewer 7-Up caps; we have the same number of Coke caps and root beer caps.
d. Make cookies to develop the concepts of not enough and more than enough. Have the children count the number present and ask how many cookies will be needed to make enough for all.

7. Identifying Groups
a. Collect objects on a walk around the school area, such as rocks, sticks, leaves or weeds. Have the children group them, putting all the rocks together, etc.
b. Put precut shapes of different colors on a table or on the flannel board. First ask the children to group them by shape, putting all the circles, squares, and triangles in three groups. Then ask the children to regroup them according to color, putting the red shapes together, the blue shapes together, etc.
c. Put many pictures on a table or tables and have the children sort the pictures into groups such as clothing, food, and toys.

8. Giving Bases for Grouping
   a. Show the children pictures of a mother, father, sister, brother, and baby. Ask the children why these people are together. Not every family will have the same number of people. Some will not have fathers, some will have many more children, some will have cousins and grandparents. Let the children talk about their own family group.
   b. Put a piece of chalk, a pencil, pen, felt tip marker, and any other writing instruments on a table. Ask the children to think of reasons why you have put these items together. Help the children to understand that these are all used for writing. Discuss where you would use each and ask the children if they can think of any others.
   c. Put three items that go together (such as chalk, pencil, pen) on a table and one that does not belong to the same group (such as a stick). Ask the children which does not belong and why. Repeat with such groups as cake, cookie, candy, and carrot, or book, magazine, newspaper, and block.

9. Telling Stories
   a. Have the children choose a magazine to look at and find one picture which they would like to tell a story about. Have them sit in teams of two when they are ready and practice telling each other about their pictures. One child at a time then tells about his picture to the rest of the class. Record the stories on tape, so they may listen to themselves later.
   b. Tell the children a short story without an ending and ask them to make suggestions for the way it should end. Discuss the suggestions and have the children decide which they like best.
   c. Have the children practice retelling a variety of stories using pictures, hand or stick puppets, or flannel board characters. They should be able to use such sequence signals as first, the, and last.